

*Conversion, the Act of Christ, an Obligation to Service, and an Encouragement to Prayer.*

A . L.

# S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D A T

## SILVER-STREET

To a SOCIETY of

## YOUNG PERSONS

On *Whitson-Monday, 1723.*

By JOHN BARKER.

Publish'd at the Request of the SOCIETY, and several Ministers who heard it.

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TO THE  
SOCIETY  
OF  
CATECHUMENS,

At whose request this SERMON was preach'd.

GENTLEMEN,



*HE benefit of catechising, as it serves to explain the more eminent and fundamental portions of the Christian doctrine, and convey to the minds of younger persons especially, that light which our Lord Jesus Christ brought into this world, must be considerable at all times, and more especially in an age of Deism and Infidelity. Such, I am sorry to say, ours appears too plainly to be. When, therefore, the sacred oracles are inwardly discredited by some, and openly scorn'd by others, it is a pleasure to see numerous societies of young persons assembling, to do honour to the person, and authority of our dear Redeemer; and with a due concern to preserve, and improve the truth, as it is in Jesus.*

*This*

## To the SOCIETY, &c.

This good work, in which you, Sirs, are engaged; The † person you have chosen to instruct and assist your souls; and the good success, with which it has pleased God to bless my worthy and reverend brethren in their labours amongst you, makes it our duty, and our pleasure, who are ministers of the Gospel, to approve and countenance your design.

When, at your request, I readily consented to preach to your society, I neither had one thought of printing the sermon, nor any imagination that you would ask it. The following discourse, which was prepared for my own congregation, and with some alteration delivered to you, is at length, by your great importunity, made publick. And if, as you make me believe, some good was done by the preaching it, and some farther advantage may be hoped from its publication, it is well. Glad shall I be, I am sure, if God make me any way instrumental to assist the souls of any, and help them forward in heaven's way; may I never spare any pains, while I can hope this shall be the fruit of my labour!

That God would increase your society, succeed your minister, prosper your souls, and grant you mercy in the great decisive day, is the sincere prayer of your affectionate servant,

Hackney June  
27, 1723.

JOHN BARKER.

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† The Reverend Mr. John Foxon.

JOHN



## JOHN XV. 16.

*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he may give it you.*



*HEN Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, he takes his Disciples aside to discourse with them concerning the sufferings he was to undergo, and the glory that would follow. The conversation, which pass'd between the dying Master and his dear Disciples, is here related; in which one cannot but observe the many wise and most endearing things he said to them, for their instruction and comfort upon this melancholy occasion. Providence now made a separation necessary; Jesus must dye and leave the world; He who came from God, must go to God; but though he pass'd from*

humiliation to glory, his love was unalterable; the change in his condition made none in his heart: so inviolable was his affection for them, that he declares his life was the fountain of theirs,—*because I live ye shall live also*,— and the Father's love to him, the pattern of his love to them,—*as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you*.— And among many other instances of the Redeemer's love to his Disciples here produc'd, this is not inconsiderable, that he did them the honour to employ them in his immediate service; committed the rich treasure of the Gospel to them; sent them to negotiate the affairs of his kingdom in the world; and allowed them freely to ask in his name whatever they wanted for their direction, encouragement, and success.

These words, then, as immediately spoken to the Disciples, intimate to us, 1<sup>st</sup>, The grace and favour, by which they were chosen to the Apostleship. 2<sup>dly</sup>, The service expected from them hereupon. And 3<sup>dly</sup>, The great encouragement they had, to proceed in their work.

*John vi. 10.* 1. The grace and favour, by which they were chosen to the Apostleship. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have first chosen you*; their election to this office was the act of Christ. *Have not I chosen you twelve?* And he made this choice of them, not because of a superior merit, greater wisdom, or more remarkable goodness in them, than was to be found in others; but merely as an act of singular grace and favour. The intimacy to which Christ admitted these men, the embassy on which they were to be employed, the power with which they were entrusted, and the spirit by whom they were inspired, was an honour put upon them by the Son of God: they had no right to this office,

office, nor qualification for it, nor prospect of success in their work, but what Jesus Christ was pleased to give them. It is the prerogative of a Prince to chuse his own ministers, and the privilege of a Master to chuse his own servants; and though the Apostles, and all Gospel-ministers after them, who are in the strictest sense the Servants of Christ, do make that holy calling their own choice; yet that choice he makes of them, is prior to theirs of him, his work, and service.

2. The service expected from them hereupon. *I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.* The Apostles were chosen by Christ to minister in holy things, to be employed in the work of the ministry, entrusted with the Gospel, to open the mysteries of it to the world, and to spread and propagate the knowledge of Christ as a Prince, and a Saviour, who had power to give eternal life. They had a commission from Christ to offer the Gospel-salvation to the souls of men, and were appointed to go from one place and nation to another, bringing them into obedience to him: they were chosen to labour and service, ordained to bring forth fruit, and *fruit that should remain*, (i. e.) the good effect of their care and labour for God's glory, the Redeemer's honour, and the advantage of precious souls was to be perpetuated. The Lord Jesus was now erecting a spiritual kingdom; and the twelve Apostles, and seventy Disciples were to lay the foundation of it, and it was to live in succession from them, one generation after another, till the end of time; so that commission and command of his, *Go ye therefore, and teach*

*Matth.*

*xxviii. 19.*

*all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world, (i. e.) with you and your successors in the ministry, for we Eph. ii. 20 are all built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

3. The great encouragement they had to proceed in their work ; *that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.* The Disciple's interest in the Lord Jesus Christ gave them an interest at the throne of grace : He counted them faithful, putting them into the ministry ; and when he had done so, assures them they should not labour in vain ; and whereas they were weak and ignorant men, and might easily foresee much difficulty in their way, and an opposition to which they were no way equal, he directs them to pray to the Father for whatsoever gifts and graces they wanted for their assistance and success. It is probable, this promise principally respects the power of working miracles, with which it was needful the Apostles should be cloath'd, and then the import of it is this : “ Whatsoever gifts and power you find necessary for the furtherance of the Gospel, and which you have occasion for in the course of your ministry, in order to prove and recommend my doctrine, convince and silence gain-sayers, and shew the seal of heaven to your commission ; you may ask it in my name, and God will give it you.

But this text of Scripture is, doubtless, applicable, besides the Disciples to whom it was immediately spoken, to all Christians who are chosen,

chosen, and ordained to grace and glory ; and being thus applied, will afford us the following observations.

I. That the sincere Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, are made such by his gracious election and choice.

II. That such as are chosen by Jesus Christ to be his Disciples, are ordained to be useful and fruitful.

III. That all Christ's Disciples have great encouragement, to pray for whatsoever will secure their present usefulness, or their future eternal salvation and happiness.

I. The sincere Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, are made such by his gracious election and choice.

Observe how our Lord expresses himself to his Disciples, *ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you*; in the former of which expressions he denies their making themselves his Disciples; and in the latter declares that he made them such. Now, if this be true as to these persons who were chosen to a certain office in the Church of God, I suppose it applicable both to ministers who are employed in the more immediate service of Christ and souls, and to the whole body of Christians who are chosen by him to grace and glory; it is true as to all of us, that *we have not chosen him, but that he has chosen us.*

Not that our Lord is here to be understood, as if his Disciples are chosen by him against their wills, or without their own consent; much less that they have made, in a strict sense, no manner of choice of him at all: no sure, *his are a willing people in the day of his power,* Christ's Disciples love their Master, and chuse his Service; they are convinc'd that he is the Christ

Christ of God, the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of glory ; they are satisfied he has a right to their services and souls, and do therefore chearfully, and with full purpose of heart, renounce and disclaim every other Lord and Owner, and confess themselves his property. Faith in his merit, compliance with his saving design, and a voluntary subjection to his authority, are essential marks of discipleship. All good people have a willing mind to be saved by Christ, and through him to be accepted of God : their understanding is enlightened in the knowledge of God, and their wills determined to a chosen submission, and entire surrender to the Lord Jesus : it is the joy of their hearts to see themselves brought to a humble reliance upon the free mercy of God in Christ for eternal salvation, and to find the Redeemer's throne erected in their souls : they know that Christ will rule all he saves ; to this they readily consent, and freely yield : it is their grief, that they have so long stood it out against Christ, oppos'd and resisted his word and Spirit, and not yielded sooner to his renewing work, and saving operation upon their souls : but now they give themselves to the Lord, adore his person, consent to his terms of mercy, chuse his ways, observe his orders, fulfil his will, and desire and delight to do so : it is their busines and pleasure, their meat and drink ; and nothing is now considered by them either as so delightful, or so important.

But the election or choice of Jesus Christ may be considered, either as intentional, or actual ; in his purpose, or in the execution of that purpose : the former of which is eternal, the latter made and done in time. Now, what I understand our Lord to mean here, is not only

only that we are chosen in him before the foundation of the world, and predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, and from the beginning chosen unto salvation; but that his actual choice of his people is prior to their choice of him, and both directs and determines it; that this great work begins on the part of our great Master, is carried on by his grace and Spirit, and perfected by his power; and that he secures to himself the glory of this work, by being the first mover, and the chief and principal actor in it. This I take to be a truth delivered to us by Jesus Christ here, and what may be well supported by the concurrent testimony of sacred Scripture: this therefore I would now attempt to illustrate and improve. Now, that the sincere Disciples of Jesus Christ were made such by his gracious election and choice, will appear, I imagine, if the following things be well considered.

1. The incapacity of the subjects of divine Grace, I mean the sinful and depraved souls of men. Sinners are incapable of making themselves Saints; they have not chosen Christ, because they neither will nor can do it without direction and assistance from him. This, I think, is sufficiently declared in Scripture in the plainest expressions, as well as by the strongest metaphors; *No man can come unto me, except the Father which John vi. bath sent me draw him: Therefore said I unto you, 44, 65. that no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.* But the natural man (i. e.) <sup>1 Cor. ii.</sup> not only a mere rational Man, but an unrenewed person, one who has nothing but what he derives from the first Adam, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. Agreeably to this, man in his state of apostacy from

from God, is said in the language of Scripture to be *dead*, and his conversion is there called

*Eph. ii. 1.* *a resurrection.* *And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; but God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace are ye saved.)* Moreover, this work from the nature of it, the power which effects it, and the great incapacity of the subject on which it is wrought is called a *new birth*, and a *new creation*.

*John iii. 3.* *Jesus said unto him, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God; and, if any man be in Christ (i. e.) vitally and savingly,*

*2 Cor. v. 17.* *is a new creature: old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new.*

Now will not this demonstrate that this work must begin on Christ's part? Can the wandering sinner find in his heart, and prevail upon himself to come to Christ without being drawn? *Can the dry bones live without the quickning power of God?* Can the depraved soul create it self after the image of God, renew it self in the spirit of its mind, and make it self alive unto God? And though it should be granted, as indeed it must, that men are not utterly incapable, in all respects, of spiritual actions, even as stocks and stones are, and as if they were really unborn, or actually dead, but in some respects only; yet surely our own reason and experience, as well as God's word, will plainly shew us, that there is a great incapacity in a fallen creature in this case; his natural inclination lyes not toward Christ at all, so far from it, that the whole current and force of nature goes the other way; besides which there is the power of example; the possession which Satan as a strong man armed has taken of the heart; and

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an habitual course of sin, and can the Ethiopian Fer. xiii.  
change his skin, or the leopard his spots? no<sup>23</sup>:  
more can they, who are accustomed to do evil, learn  
to do well. Every child of Adam is prone to  
evil; we are born to sin, as well as trouble, as  
the sparks fly upward: Man, in his natural state,  
is bent towards worldliness, sensuality, and far-  
ther departure from God; his senses, passions,  
and treacherous, dark, and foolish heart, all serve  
to expose and ensnare him, to pollute and de-  
ceive him, to drive him down the stream of  
sin, to keep him in ignorance and unbelief,  
and to make his turning to God, and choice  
of Christ, as his Saviour, Lord and portion,  
without light and strength from heaven, not  
difficult only, but impossible.

2. The power of the efficient. The effici-  
ent cause of a sinner's conversion, is all along in  
Scripture said to be God; and the power ex-  
erted on this occasion you there find to be re-  
markable; so that God is not the author of this  
work, merely as he is of any and every other; he  
does not only so concur in this, as he does  
in any and every simple action, which a rea-  
sonable creature performs, such as moving any  
part of the body, using any faculty of the mind,  
and the like; no, but the thing is so express'd as  
to raise our attention, and to persuade us that the  
work is eminently of God, and so performed as  
to bear down great opposition, and bring a con-  
siderable glory to its author. Thus it is said, 2 Cor. iv. 6  
*God, who commanded the light to shine out of dark-  
ness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of  
the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of  
Jesus Christ.* Why is it said, God, who com-  
manded the light to shine out of darkness, does  
this? Doubtless, to intimate the beauty of the  
work, and the power needful to effect it. Who  
but a God, by power almighty, could command  
C light

light to shine out of darkness? Well ! such is the power he exerts, when he savingly reveals Christ Jesus to the souls of sinful men. Again, The Apostle in his Epistle to the *Ephesians* tells us, there is *an exceeding greatness in the power of God*, which is exerted towards them that believe; and that it is the very same power *Eph. i. 19.* which he wrought in Christ, when *he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heaven.* The same almighty power is manifested, and display'd in the conversion, sanctification, and glorification of fallen creatures, which appeared in the Resurrection, Exaltation, and Glory of Jesus Christ: And, I am sure, if such a power as this be needful to bring sinners into this state, there must needs be a great incapacity in the subject, a great opposition to the work, and vast resistance made by such as have gotten possession of the soul: Whence it must follow, that the work must begin on Christ's part, and be carried on by a divine hand; and that it is neither in the power of the creature to effect it, nor in his will to desire it in a sincere and persevering manner, till the great Lord of all things takes him into his hands, and *opens his eyes, and turns him from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

3. The nature of the means. The means of conversion are either ordinary or extraordinary, the latter of which are but seldom used, and upon special occasions, when it pleases God to manifest himself more visibly, and shew forth the *working of his mighty power* in a more remarkable and distinguishing way. *Paul* was indeed thus changed and chosen by Jesus Christ; the nature of sin was discovered to him by an astonishing light from heaven, and his heart pierc'd

pierced through with an awakening voice from thence ; he was suddenly and at once transformed from a devouring wolf, to a lamb of that flock, against which he breathed out threatenings and slaughter ; and made a chosen vessel for the service of Christ, by such means as to astonish himself and surprise the world. Now in such an instance as this, nothing is more evident, than that the work not only begins, but is wholly, and in all the parts and circumstances of it, eminently of God. But what we have most of all to do with, is the ordinary means by which Christ works that change, which is necessary to shew his saving choice of his people : Now these are not only such as always secure the exceeding riches of grace, but however proper they are to the end proposed, they are either successful, or otherwise ; they are either effectual, or ineffectual, as he is pleased to virtuate and enforce them. When the Lord opened the Heart of *Lydia*, she attended unto *Acts xvii.*  
*the things which were spoken by Paul* ; but all <sup>14.</sup> *xxvi.*  
 his reasonings with King *Agrippa* did but almost <sup>27.</sup>  
*persuade him to be a Christian.* To what shall we ascribe it, that the Gospel is *the savour of life unto life unto some*, and of *death unto death unto others* ? That to this soul it appears with a divine transforming efficacy, and to that is only as a dead letter ? and while it takes some and quickens them into life, it leaves others with hearts and souls cold, and hard, and dead ? Whence is it that persons in other cases teachable, and yielding, and ready to comply with the force of reasoning, should, in a case where their highest interest is concerned, be deaf, and obstinate, and unpersuadable ? That there is a fault in men, to whom the Gospel comes *in word only*, is indisputable ; that they are chargeable

able with guilty inattention, and deserve the severest punishment, who wilfully neglect the great salvation, I make no question: Far be it from us to excuse their sin, or charge their misery upon God, who sit from time to time under the light and sound of an *ineffectual* Gospel; but we may safely assert the work of grace to begin on Christ's part, and entitle him to all the glory of our salvation, while we charge the guilt of sinners upon themselves, and lay their damnation and misery at their own door.

4 The way and manner in which this happy event is secured. We all agree, that the means of conversion to God are various; he has as many ways of coming at men's hearts as he pleases to use, and has accordingly determined the will of a sinner to an unfeigned consent to his terms of mercy differently, sometimes (*for example*) by a remarkable providence, especially an afflictive one; sometimes by good books, or by good men; but ordinarily by the preaching and reading the several parts of his own word. But how comes it to pass, that the heart is opened at one time, which was for many years before, perhaps, just closed up in ignorance and in unbelief? How comes it, that this and the other soul hears, consents, believes, and yields to God when many others remain unaffected? How is this event secured, in any and in all cases of this kind, contrary to the whole current of corrupted nature, the force of sinful habits and example, and in spite of all the powers of darkness? Is it man's work, or God's work? Is it done by chance, or by a divine influence? Is it to be ascrib'd to the power of nature, or to the power of the God of nature? Whoever is the instrument, and whatever the means of this change

change, doubtless the work became effectual, because it is of God ; as it oftentimes, and may be under the fairest and most promising appearances, because it is not of God, dies and comes to nothing. Should persons chosen of Christ be called to remember, and acquaint us how they come to be converted, they would readily answer, *by grace we are saved through faith, and that not of our selves, it is the gift of God.* As the air would no more admit the beams of the sun than a rock, were it not suited and dispos'd hereunto by that God, who commands the light to shine into it ; so neither will the rocky hearts of men admit the light of the Gospel to any saving purpose, till softened by the hand of God, and brought under a divine impression. I conclude therefore with the Apostle, *That it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy that God saves us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour ; that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life.*

*Secondly,* I proceed to apply this Doctrine. And

1. You see here the reason of that expostulation of the Apostle, *who maketh thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ?* To what shall we ascribe the saving change wrought upon the souls of Christ's Disciples ? Whence is the original of this work ? from heaven, or of men ? Jesus Christ is the Lord and Saviour of his people ; they have an interest in him, and an union with him that is vital and saving ; they receive him as an atoning sacrifice, a vital head, and a governing Lord ; and

and repenting, believing, and obeying they are *washed, sanctified, and justified in his name*: Now whence is it that this great and happy event is secured? Will you ascribe it to the natural temper of the convert? Doubtless that is not the cause, partly because persons of all tempers are made the triumphs of divine grace, and they of all tempers left under the dominion of Satan; and partly because it sometimes happens that in the same family, congregation, or neighbourhood, the less easy and agreeable tempered persons shall be affected and touched with a sense of sin, and a sense of God, when the more agreeable and sweeter disposition shall be led away with evil company and evil practices, and left to fall a sacrifice to sin and temptation, finally and for ever.

Or will you ascribe this work to good education? This may be a means of conversion, which God is pleased sometimes to own: It is the duty of superiors to use and try it, and the happiness of inferiors to come under it: Being bless'd of God, and meeting with a good disposition, it may make the passage of his word or providence to the heart of the convert easier, and less visible and remarkable: For which reason the soul may not be able to date its conversion from any certain time, nor give a very distinct and particular account of the manner, in which this was wrought; a circumstance, which I have sometimes observed to give good persons many needless scruples, and very disquieting thoughts. But this can be no certain cause of our conversion to God, or of Christ's choice of us; for then, well educated persons would be converts in course, and ill educated ones remain in their state of apostacy: Whereas it often happens otherwise;

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God frequently takes one of a family, and two of a tribe, where there was no fear of him, no family instruction, parental admonition, faithful counsel, and solemn prayer; and on the other hand, there are many very sad instances of holy parents, who lament over their ungodly children, and who notwithstanding all their pains and prayers, their wholesome advice and passionate intreaties, their solemn warnings and many tears, see their children grow up in wickedness, depart from God and all that is good, pursue the profits or pleasures of the world at the expence of their souls, and the grey hairs of the good old parent go down, by reason of their children's apostacy, with sorrow to the grave. Again,

Will you attribute this to ministerial or any other persuasion? This I own is a proper and a natural means of conversion, for real religion is a most reasonable service; and God is pleased often to own this means, and indeed has instituted and appointed it; *we are ambassadors* <sup>2 Cor. v.</sup> *for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us;* <sup>20.</sup> *we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Faithful ministers knowing the mercies of the Lord beseech, and knowing his terrors persuade men. But this is no certain cause of their conversion, for then it would always produce this effect, if not extraordinarily hindred; whereas, how often do the servants of God go with all imaginable advantage to sinful men, and come away as they went! How often are the most fervent and eloquent preachers unsuccessful! They set and devise the most acceptable words, pray to God for assistance, long for the dawn of the day of grace upon the souls of them that hear them, and beseech poor sinners in the bowels of Christ to repent, and believe

lieve the Gospel, but all is in vain ; few or none believe their report, at best perhaps they only obtain a cold assent to the truth of the Gospel, but no consent to its terms, no hearty compliance with its saving design. " Ah " Lord God ! How often do thy servants la- " bour in vain and spend their strength for " nought ! How does the God of this world " blind the minds of miserable sinners ? While " we preach even Jesus Christ and him cruci- " fied, a subject full of wonder, full of glory, " we are yet looked upon, but as men that " dream ! We display the glories of an incar- " nate God, and open the mysteries of his " sufferings and his grace, his bleeding com- " passions and dying love, and all almost in " vain ! We erect the banner of the cross, but few " or none come under it ! Things, which the " Angels stoop to look into, affect but few of " the children of men ! All the glories of hea- " ven will hardly call off a single eye from " the false and perishing ones of this ensnaring " world ; we obtest and beseech ; we charge " and warn in vain ; we are discouraged by ill " success ; the accents die upon our tongues ; " we are ready to say, wherefore are we sent ! " Lord, are thy servants the only ones who " can't prevail ! Hast thou sent us only to ag- " gravate the damnation of sinners, and in- " flame the black reckoning of the judgment " day ! Must thy Gospel be only a favour of " death unto death ! We preach the unsearch- " able riches of Christ, and declare the testimony " of God ; our doctrine is the truth as it is in " Jesus, agreeable to antient prophecies, and " confirmed by signs and wonders, and diverse " miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, and yet it is " seldom regarded ! Thy servants have hardly the " success

success of other men: The merchant trades to advantage: The soldier obtains his victory, and sings his triumph: The husbandman plows, and sows in hope, and reaps the fruit of his labour; but we run, as uncertainly; we so fight, as those that beat the air; when we would in great earnest teach men the way of salvation, we are glad to be heard with patience, and it is well if we are not answered with the scoffs of the profane, and become not the song of the drunkard; ah Lord God! when shall thine Israel be gathered! When shall our success be equal to our hopes and wishes! When shall the arm of God be revealed, and the spirit of the Lord be poured forth from on high!

Finally, will you ascribe this work to the resolution of unassisted nature? if so, you directly contradict the Apostle in the expostulation quoted above, and elsewhere, when he says, *by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of your selves, it is the gift of God.* Besides, if resolution be the cause of this fruit, how come men not to take it sooner? How come so few thus to resolve? How come so many of these resolutions to be broken? And how comes one man of lower capacity, less understanding, and every way inferior to his neighbour, to be so happy as to resolve to good purpose, while the other has hardly made his resolutions, it may be, before he breaks them all? No alas! This is not the cause of this work, nor has any man on this account whereof to glory. Would to God there were more wise and sober resolutions daily made: it is doubtless a good thing, and every good man will frequently resolve against sin, and for God; but every wise man will make such resolution in God's strength,

Rom. ix.  
16.

and however thankful he may be, if so happy as to keep his faith, he will not however ascribe either his conversion, or perseverance, to this as the cause: *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who sheweth mercy.*

2. How great is the glory, such as Christ has chosen, ought to account due to sovereign grace! Great adoration ought to be paid to that grace, which makes us to differ from others. We are naturally as ignorant, dark, and obstinate; as perverse, disobedient, and rebellious; as any of our fellow creatures. Where had we been, if God for our sins had pass'd us by? What had been our condition now, if God had not called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, and *translated us out of the kingdom of Satan into that of his dear Son?* Whether it were done by ordinances or providences, by judgment or mercy, by a virtuous education, or without it, and contrary to it; if our stony hearts are taken away, and God has given us hearts of flesh; if the enmity of the carnal mind be conquered, and our souls are made the seats of God's triumphant and victorious grace, we have the greatest reason to rejoice, acknowledge the grace of God, and glorify that grace accordingly. Happy they, whom God has not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. This should silence the unjust complaints and cavils of all such against Christ, who have not chosen him, nor are chosen by him. Sinful man has nothing due to him from a just and righteous God, but wrath and punishment. Should he never give the means of grace to such as have forfeited his favour, he does them no wrong; and should he finally withdraw his grieved

grieved Spirit, there would be no unrighteousness with him. Though no man can of himself procure his own salvation, every one does enough to deserve his own destruction: *What, therefore, if God shews his wrath, on such as have made themselves vessels of wrath; and makes known the riches of his glory, on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory:* If God shew mercy to some, who deserve it not, and punish those who have fitted themselves for destruction: If he pardons the undeserving, and punishes the guilty, he does no wrong to any. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!*

4. Let none, who are not yet disciples in a saving sense, despair of their being made such by the gracious election, and choice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider and approve the method of salvation proposed in the Gospel; affect your own hearts (as ye are able) with a sense of sin, with the worth of your souls, and the weight of eternity; humble your selves before God, under a sense of your great unworthiness, and heavy guilt; attend upon the ordinances of God; beg a blessing upon the means of grace; lie at the pool, and wait the stirring of those waters, which have a healing and cleansing virtue in them. *Do not go about to establish to your selves a righteousness of your own; but submit your selves to the righteousness of God.* Do not quench, resist, or grieve, the holy Spirit, but yield to his motions, admit his renewing work, and cherish his gracious influences. Flee to Christ as the refuge of your guilty souls, and earnestly pray to be justified by his merit, and saved by his power. You may do this, and are bound to do it, by all that is sacred, and by all that is dear: And you have

great encouragement hereunto, because the converting saving grace of God is often in holy Scripture made the matter of exhortation, and the subject of a promise: That great promise,  
*Ezekiel xxxvi. 26.* *A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you,* is elsewhere turned into a  
*Ch. xviii. 13.* precept, *Make you a new heart, and a new spirit.*  
*John v. 40.* Our Lord, who says, *No man can come unto me, except the father, which hath sent me, draw him;* yet upbraids the Jews with their great obstinacy, saying, *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.* And the Apostle, who constantly ascribes the salvation of sinners to the grace of  
*Phil. ii. 12.* God, yet warmly exhorts us to *work out our own salvation with fear, and trembling:* From whence it follows, that although you are insufficient to effect a saving change upon yourselves, there is yet a great duty incumbent upon you in this case, the neglect of which involves aggravated guilt, and extreme danger; but the performance of which is very favourable, and promising towards every serious, and  
*Luke xi. 13.* awakened soul. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father, give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

The second observation from these words is this; that such as are chosen by Jesus Christ to be his Disciples, are ordained to be useful, and fruitful. *I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit, and the your fruit should remain.*

In speaking to this doctrine I should

I. Enquire, how, and in what manner Christ Disciples should be useful, and fruitful?

II. Why, and on what accounts they should be so?

I. How, and in what manner should Christ's Disciples be useful, and fruitful ? I answer,

Generally in all the parts of Gospel-holiness and obedience. They, who are chosen by Jesus Christ, are chosen to the means, as well as the end, and are ordained to be *holy*, as well as appointed to be *happy*. *God hath from the beginning chosen you unto salvation, through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth :* <sup>1 Thess. ii. 13.</sup> And *God hath not called us to uncleanness (i. e.) to take liberty to defile our selves with any kind of sin, but unto holiness.* Christ's Disciples are called to be saints, and are saved, and called with <sup>Rom. i. 7.</sup> an holy calling, which has this appellation from <sup>and 2 Tim. i. 9.</sup> its author, means, and end. The holy Scripture greatly magnifies the riches of divine grace, and steadily presses the duty of those who are the happy subjects of it. Both these points are particularly laboured by the Apostle Paul, who carefully directs every convert to glorify God in heart and life, in word and action. Remember, then, you who are the election and choice of Jesus Christ, that you are ordained to be holy and good, useful and fruitful; that God, to whom it is your duty and honour to conform, proposes his holiness to your imitation; *be ye holy, for I am holy.* Jesus Christ, who has chosen you, is a pattern of holiness and goodness to his people; and we are obliged to imitate his example, as ever we hope to be saved by his death. Subjection to Christ's authority, is as necessary to salvation, as faith in his name: He is a Prince, as well as a Saviour: He extends over the hearts of his people a scepter of rule and authority, as well as of grace: He saves none whom he does not rule, but accounts them enemies, *who will not that*

*be*

*he should reign over them.* The Gospel likewise requires of Christians a professed subjection, and uniform obedience. It is a rule of faith and duty, as well as a charter of privileges, and a ground of eternal hopes and prospects. It is the word of Christ, which is to dwell richly in all Christians, as a word of caution, exhortation, and warning, as well as of counsel and comfort. In a word, it is an unalterable Gospel-

<sup>1</sup> *Pet. i.* truth, that Christians are to be *holy in all manner of conversation*; that the righteous Lord loveth righteousness; and that *whosoever doth not 10. righteousness is not of God, neither he who loveth not his brother.*

Particularly,

In all those things, which are our more direct and immediate duty. The Apostles were chosen by Christ, to gather his Church out of the ruins of an apostate world, and were charged by him to this end, *to go and preach the Gospel to every creature*: and this they were to do with zeal and diligence, resolution and courage, without fear of men, or terror of any sufferings they could inflict. Gospel-ministers are likewise to be useful, according to their capacity, the same way, preaching *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*. The doctrine of the Gospel is committed to them, and they are to *keep it by the Holy Ghost, who dwelleth in them*; (i. e.) pure without corruption, and entire without alteration; and to dispense it to all as the word of their salvation.

<sup>1</sup> *Tim. iii.* And as all such are obliged to be *blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, and apt to teach, 2. studying to shew themselves approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*; so if God see fit to try their sincerity and courage, they are, in love to

Christ and precious souls, and in the hope of a glorious reward, to endure all things for the e-<sup>2</sup> Tim. ii. lects sake, that they may obtain the salvation which <sup>10.</sup>

*is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.* Ministers are to do their utmost, to rescue precious souls from the tyranny of Satan, the bondage of sin, and the danger of eternal death ; and in this work are not to be terrified by their adversaries, nor discouraged with ill success. Private Christians are likewise bound by the command of Christ, the choice he has made of them, and their covenant obligation to him, to serve the purposes of God's glory, do their master's work, and serve their generation according to his will. The Disciples of Christ are entrusted by him with several talents, which they are to use and employ in his service, and neither to abuse and pervert, nor hide and lay by. They are not only to detest the behaviour of such wicked servants as are sensual, abusive, and injurious to their brethren ; but to dread the doom of unprofitable servants, who through shameful sloth, and criminal neglect, are useless in the world, and Church of God. Our time and health, our estates and capacities, our inward furniture, and outward advantages, are to be employed in the service of our great master : We are all stewards, and of such it is required, that they be found faithful. The relation which Christians bear to Christ, is like that of the members to the head in the natural body, where every one performs the office to which it is appointed, for the benefit of the whole. This allusion is frequently made in holy Scripture, particularly by the Apostle Paul, who argues upon it, to our present purpose, in the following manner. *As we have many members in one body, and all members have not 4. and fol-*

*Rom. xii.  
the verses.*

the same office; so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another: Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us demean our selves soberly in the use of them; whether prophecy, let us prophesie according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministring; or be that teacheth, on teaching; or be that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; He that ruleth with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with chearfulness. Let love be without dissimulation: abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good: be kindly affectioned one to another; with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another: not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer, &c.

## II. Why, and on what accounts, should Christ's Disciples be useful, and fruitful?

(1.) They were chosen by him for this end, and purpose. *I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go, and bring forth fruit.* When Christ chuses Disciples out of the world, he intends to use, and employ them for the purposes of his glory. They are not to be indolent and unprofitable, any more than carnal and sensual; neither to love and serve sin, nor serve, and live to themselves. They are the

*Mat. v. 13. salt of the earth,* who being indued with the

*2 Cor. ii. grace of God,* are to season others. *Thanks be*

*14. unto God, who maketh manifest the favour of his knowledge by us in every place.* They are the *light of the world,* who discover the excellency and glory of Christ to those about them: Be-

*Phil. iii. 15. ing blameless, and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation;*

*nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.* It is the intention of Christ as to all his people, that they be serious, useful, and exemplary to others. For this end they were chosen; and they do not answer this end, but contradict it, if they be not, and do not good.

(2.) It is a sure mark of discipleship. Every living branch in Jesus Christ bears the fruits of real holiness; if we *abide in him, and his words abide in us, so, shall we be*; (i. e.) appear to be, *his Disciples*. That faith which is justifying and saving, is a principle of holy action, and a spring of duty and usefulness, setting all the powers of the soul on work in the service of God, and the Redeemer. That love to Christ, which burns and reigns in the hearts of Christians, and is evidential of his special love to them, is always attended with holiness and obedience. *If ye love me, keep my commandments; if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.* If the fruit be good, it is a certain sign the tree is so. Holiness of life plainly evidences a sanctified heart. The fruits of paradise do not grow in the garden of nature. If men be taught effectually to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world; doubtless, the grace of God has appeared to them, bringing salvation.

(3.) It is honourable to God, and ornamental to Religion. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit:* This is an evidence of God's faithfulness to his own, begets high thoughts of him in their minds, and occasions others to glorify him. *The fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, greatly tend to the glory and praise of God.* A serious, useful, exemplary, charitable Christian, bears the i-

image of God, shews the same mind that was in Christ, and is a living witness, and bears an honourable testimony to his name, in a sensual, ignorant, and perverse world. When professed Christians give occasion to men to speak against them as evil doers, it is a dishonour to God, and a discredit to the holy name by which they are called; but when their light so shines before men, as that they see their good works, they will be naturally led to glorify their Father who is in heaven.

(4.) Want of this is a sure sign, that we are not chosen and accepted by Jesus Christ. Useless and fruitless persons are not sincere Disciples. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, or, every branch that beareth not fruit in me;* such fruit as proceeds from faith in me, and is produced by my word and Spirit, *be taketh away;* and if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, (i. e.) a dry one, and withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If there be the leaves, and blossoms of profession only, these will fail, and come to nothing; or if the branch be not inserted into the vine, and partake not of its vital sap, it will wither, and become fit for nothing but the fire. Hypocrites and Apostates bear no fruit in Christ; belong not to him in a sound and saving sense; have no vital union with him; and will be hereafter cast off and rejected by him.

For these reasons, therefore, it appears necessary, that Christ's Disciples be useful, and fruitful, and that any dependance short of this, must be vain and unsafe. It is not enough to name the name of Christ, if we do not also depart from iniquity: *Not he that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will*

*will of our Father who is in heaven.* Real Christianity is a vital and spiritual thing; it consists in an opposition to sin, and in the fruits of holiness; and without those, let mens pretences be what they will, they are not the sincere Disciples of Jesus Christ, but the servants of sin, this world, and the God of this world.

III. The sincere Disciples of Jesus Christ have great encouragement to pray to God, for whatsoever will secure their present usefulness, or their future salvation, and happiness. *That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.* Although this promise, as was observed above, principally respects the power of working miracles for the proof of the Christian religion, and so, was more immediately made to the Disciples; yet doubtless it may be considered as a precious promise, in which ordinary Christians have a share. It is an encouragement to all Christ's Disciples, to ask of God what they find needful, for the furtherance of his work in their souls now, and for the finishing of it hereafter. The ground of this encouragement is,

(i.) The object of prayer here directed to, (i. e) God in the relation of a Father. God is the common Father of all the rational world, whose spirits are in a peculiar manner his offspring. *He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.* But as the case now stands with fallen man, it would be but small advantage to have God for our Father by creation only: the human nature being depraved by sin, the natural faculties of understanding, will, and power are very much weakened, and the moral perfections of righteousness, and true holiness lost; and therefore our

blessed Saviour has made his Disciples the children of God by adoption and grace, and has renewed the relation between God and them.

*John i. 12.* *As many as received him, to them gave he power, (i. e.) privilege, to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* Christ here calls God the Father, (i. e.) your Father as well as mine, the common Father of all them that believe it

*John xx. 17.* *I ascend (says he) to my Father, and your Father, to my God, and your God;* a marvelous expression! full of wonder, grace, and love! Parental tenderness and affection is exceeding great; the pleadings of nature are always forcible, and commonly prevail, whether it be for gifts of bounty, or acts of forgiveness and pity. What may not a child expect from his father? Love here joins with prudence, to incline the heart to yield, to open the hand, and to give liberally, and without grudging, every proper and needful benefit, either of providence, or of grace. When the holy Spirit, in the word of God, and in the hearts of his people, teaches them to cry *ab Father,* they have a strong reason to hope for acceptance and success. If parental tenderne work so strongly in creatures, how much more in God, the fountain of love, who has all the strength and beauty of that perfection, without any of the weakness of it! The object of the Christian's prayer is the God of grace, of all consolation; as ready, as able to hear, to help us.

(2.) The manner in which they are taught to pray, (i. e.) *in the name of Christ.* He both admits his Disciples to use his name in prayer, and enjoins it upon them. It is their advantage, and their duty; and this was till now

new and unknown thing. It is peculiar to the Christian Revelation, and a distinguishing privilege of the Gospel. The whole Pagan world is ignorant of this, and the antient Church of God was not admitted to this high and glorious privilege. They of old called upon God, as the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*; but Christians are taught, as to do all things generally *in the name of Jesus Christ*, so particularly to pray in it, (i. e.) to come unto God, believing in his mediation and merit; depending upon his power and interest in heaven; relying upon the virtue of his blood, and the prevalency of his intercession. To encourage our faith and prayer, he is represented in the Gospel as our sacrifice of atonement, and our advocate with the Father; and we are assured, that all the *promises of God are in him yea, and Amen.* The Mediator's blood makes the throne of God, a throne of grace; and his name perfumes the prayers of the Saints, and makes them as a grateful incense in heaven. It is a precious and powerful name; it gives force to the pleadings of his people, and encourages their humble importunity in prayer; it is a name Christians delight to mention, and which God delights to hear.

(3.) The subject matter of prayer here propos'd. *Whatsoever ye shall ask.* This general expression may be thus explain'd and qualified: Whatever ye shall ask the Father, that will be for his glory to give, you may ask with freedom and confidence. Our Lord has taught us this by his own example: *Hallowed be thy name,* is one part of the Lord's Prayer; and *Father glorify thy self,* is a most dutiful address, exceeding proper, and very powerful. This to be sure is fit for us to ask, because it is proper for

for God to answer. His own glory is the great end of all God's actions, and should be the sum of all our desires. Again, Whatsoever will make us really useful and fruitful; Whatsoever will make us wise and good; furnish us for God's service, and fit us for that of our generation; cast a light upon divine truth, or lead us into the path of duty, useful knowledge, and real grace; every gift and endowment which serves to constitute, adorn, or recommend the Christian character, is the proper subject of prayer. Finally, Whatsoever will contribute to our eternal salvation, and issue in it, may be ask'd of God: of this he only can judge properly; to him therefore we are to apply ourselves, resigning, in all the vast variety of events which happen to us in this world, entirely, to his infinite wisdom, and grace

#### *A P P L I C A T I O N.*

(1.) Infer from hence the love of Christ to his Disciples. The whole discourse he had with them, upon the sorrowful occasion of his departure out of this world, is greatly evidential of his love. But I have my eye now upon the passage just explain'd; and this shews us the greatness of his love to his people.

In the liberty he has given them to pray. The Disciples of Christ have leave to pray to God at all times, in every place, and upon all occasions: They may pray with all prayer, social and solitary, stated and occasional, ordinary and solemn: They may pray in faith, nothing doubting: They have freedom of access to the throne of grace, and may ask for grace and strength to help them in every time of need: They may come to God as a Father: They may freely

freely use the name of Christ: They may ask the greatest, and the best of blessings; and they may always come with the greatest encouragement, and hope of success. We cannot go with this assurance to any friend on earth; Creatures alter and change: We may be welcome to them at one time, and not at another: They may not be able to help us, or unwilling to do it; or make a difficulty and scruple to assist and serve us. But God is our fast and sure friend, an unchangeable and never failing one; made so by the death, and kept so by the intercession of Jesus Christ. How much do Christians owe in this case to the love of their Saviour!

(2.) The benefit and advantage of prayer. Good people have always found an intercourse with heaven the most comfortable, and gainful thing in the world. This has been the concurring testimony of the righteous, ever since men began at first to call upon God. Let us therefore be sensible of our privilege, and humbly use and improve it for the glory of God, and the good of our souls.

(3.) We may hence assign a reason, why we many times obtain not what we ask of God in prayer. Perhaps we ask, what it is improper for God to bestow, or would be hurtful, rather than profitable for us to receive; or we ask amiss as to the manner in which we pray, and the frame and temper of our own spirits. We may be careless, and irreverent; cold, and lifeless; weary and too soon discouraged, or injurious to our brethren; unforgiving, and uncharitable. Or, perhaps, we have secret dealings with sin; and because we *regard iniquity in our hearts, God does not hear our prayers*: Or, it may be, we leave out the name of Christ, or do

not so rely upon his merit, power, intercession, and holy Spirit, as we should do. We ourselves often disappoint our own prayers, and are sometimes ready to think hardly of God and providence, saying, what advantage is there in calling upon the Lord? when in truth we have nothing to blame but our own sin, and folly.

(4.) Observe from hence the close connection that is established, between the means and the end, in the Gospel of the grace of God: Between Christ's choice of his people, and their love to him: His ordination of them to grace and glory, and their holiness and obedience: Between grace and duty; prayer and perseverance; our constant supply from God, and our continual expectation, dependance, and address. Wherefore, what God has joined together, let not man put asunder.

I would now close with a few advices to younger persons, especially such, as, it may be hoped, are chosen by Christ, and training up for heaven. And to such I would say,

(1.) Be sensible, that all the real good you propose to do, or to get, is not from yourselves, but from the grace of God, and the gracious ordination and appointment of Jesus Christ.

(2.) While you propose rightly to understand the great doctrines of the Gospel, as they are there revealed, or laid together in such excellent summaries of our religion, as the Assembly's Catechism; be duly concerned faithfully to discharge the great duties of Christianity, there also strongly and seriously recommended.

(3.) Be very humble. The more you know the more you will see of the ignorance, weakness, and corruption of depraved nature.

*not wise in your own conceit,* is apostolical advice. *Roms. xii.*  
That knowledge which puffs up the mind, and <sup>16</sup> makes people either conceited, captious, or uncharitable, does more hurt than good. *Wherefore be not high minded, but fear.* The heat and forwardness so natural to youth, makes a visible humility in such persons the more ornamental.

(4.) Be much in prayer. This is both your duty and interest: No good person lives without prayer, and they who are best, pray most. The advantage of prayer, as to knowledge, grace, and comfort, is much every way. Prayer is the life of practical religion, and a known preservative from the infection of sin.

(5.) Be watchful and jealous over your selves with a godly jealousy. All people are expos'd to snares and temptations, but the younger, most of all. Be cautious with whom you associate, and whither you resort. *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.* Take heed of every kind of intemperance and excess: Keep out of the path of the destroyer, and deal seriously with your own souls, that you may know and avoid the deceitful and destructive arts of the God of this world.

Lastly, Let your resolution for God, and Christ be fixed, and perpetual. Do not *begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh.* Let it not be said of you, as, perhaps, it is of some you know, *bey did run well, but are bindred.* Let it appear that real religion lies near to your heart, and that you are under an absolute determination of mind to follow the Lord fully, without wavering or uncertainty. Let not your purposes be fickle and unsteady; but let your *heart be inclined to perform all God's statutes, always unto the end:* And make it appear, that your *spirit does not stand in the wisdom of men, but in*

*the power of God.* And to this purpose, be sensible of your own weakness; the necessity of divine grace; the aids of God's Spirit, and the diligent use of the word, sacraments, and prayer.

*And now, Brethren, I commend you to God, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified.*

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